

Random Encounters

III Met on the River of Dreams

By Skip Williams



The Maelstrom

Two yrthaks have chosen the area around one of the deadly whirlpools on the river's upper reach as their favorite hunting ground. They lie in wait above the vortex, hidden in caves high above the riverbanks.



Thick veils of trees and trailing vines render the cave openings all but invisible to anyone looking up at them from the level of the river. The yrthaks crouch just inside and remain alert for sounds of travelers approaching, and they fly out to attack when their prey passes beneath. If the interlopers travel in boats, the yrthaks appear just as the craft encounter the maelstrom's pull.

The deadly whirlpool looks just like any other patch of white water on the river; however, a character can recognize the danger with a Survival check (DC 15). A successful check allows the character to realize that the rough patch of water ahead is no ordinary rapids.

Should a party avoid the vortex, either by pulling their boats out of the water and portaging around the hazard or simply by going on foot, the yrthaks attack. They believe that avoiding the deadly whirlpool is unsporting, at the very least, and they shriek in frustration as they fight.

The whirlpool creates a dangerous area as wide as the river (about 80 feet here) and about 100 feet long, with the whirlpool in the center. It is possible to steer a boat past the whirlpool, but doing so requires a Profession (boater) check (DC 20). With a successful check, a boat shoots safely past the vortex in 1 round, no matter what the craft's normal speed is. (The current seizes the craft and shoves it along.)

Failure wrecks the boat and throws all the cargo and passengers into the water at a random location within the deadly area, but usually within 10 to 60 feet of the vortex. Swimmers in the water near the whirlpool must make Swim checks (DC 20) to avoid being sucked down. With a successful check, a swimmer is thrown past the whirlpool, just as a boat is. On a failed check, a swimmer is pulled underwater, shot through a subterranean passage, and deposited about a quarter mile farther down river. The victim remains underwater for 2d4 minutes and suffers 2d6 points of nonlethal damage each minute. Characters that survive the passage can swim to shore.

If the yrthaks notice any swimmers being sucked underwater, they immediately break off their attack and fly down river, where they expect to feast on the victim's bodies after they emerge from the subterranean passage.

Yrthaks (2): hp 102 each, see *Monster Manual*, page 262.

These yrthaks have collected no treasure. Any valuables their previous victims might have dropped have been long since lost at the bottom of the river.

Bringing the Parts Together

The yrthaks may occasionally leave their perches to go hunting elsewhere, especially if no prey has approached the whirlpool recently. If they encounter anyone traveling by boat upstream of the whirlpool, they're crafty enough to bide their time until the boats reach the vortex. They pretend to ignore the boats and fly on, but they return every few hours to make sure the party remains on course for the whirlpool. Because the yrthaks can "see" only 120 feet with their blindsight abilities, this may give the party several chances to damage the monsters before the yrthaks are ready to attack.

If the party continues downstream after dealing with the yrthaks and the whirlpool, they'll enter the grove of the shrieking idols next.

Coming in Part 2 of III Met on the River of Dreams

What lurks in a grove of totem poles? Find out in the Grove of Shrieking Idols.

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